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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

JULY 1st, 1857.

THE GREAT HANDEL FESTIVAL AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE.

THE Handel Festival is undoubtedly one of the great events of the age. It is the homage of a people to the genius of a man, and it indicates the existence, on the part of the British public, of a love of music to a much greater extent than it has hitherto been supposed to possess. A century will have elapsed, in 1859, since the death of the great composer, and the glorious melodies and sublime choruses which he has bequeathed to the country still retain a permanent and enduring hold on the public mind. In every direction are to be seen evidences of a growing appreciation of the works of Handel. It is fitting that England should thus unite to do honour to the memory of one of the noblest of her adopted sons, for it was for England, for Englishmen, and in the English language that all the great masterpieces of this magnificent composer were produced. In no country in the world are these works so well known, so carefully studied, or so frequently performed. "Handel made England musical, and England made Handel English."

The idea of commemorating the genius of Handel by an unparalleled performance of some of his masterpieces originated with Mr. Bowley, the able and energetic treasurer of the Sacred Harmonic Society, and to his untiring energies, ably assisted by his worthy coadjutor, Mr. Brewer, the secretary, is mainly due the completion of the arrangements for this great enterprise; and few circumstances in modern times show in a more striking manner the great results which may be obtained by persevering individual exertion. Twenty-five years since, the music of Handel was but little appreciated. It remained for the Sacred Harmonic Society to reveal to the British public the rich store of melody, which every year grows in esteem, and which, with the works of our own Shakespeare, will be handed down to posterity as the most precious of our heirlooms.

We would also mention, as deserving of praise, the various superintendents of the society, who were—for the trebles, Mr. Hill; the altos, Mr. Husk; the tenors, Mr. Carmichael; the basses, Mr. Whitehorn; and for the band, Mr. Winson. Upon these gentlemen, aided by six assistant superintendents in each department, devolved the entire control (under Mr. Costa) of the orchestra.

The effect of so many as 2000 trained vocalists singing together, with the accompaniment of so immense a band, and an organ of such great power, was a point upon which many doubts were expressed. All uncertainty is now at an end, and, in a musical point of view, the Handel Festival must be considered as a great and triumphant success. Numerous large meetings of musicians have been held at various periods; but never yet in the world's history has choral music been sung to greater perfection, or its vast powers in affecting the human mind been more strongly felt. Lofty enthusiasm, noble patriotism, sympathetic grief, stern resolves, feelings of adoration and reverential awe, by turn swayed the imagination, as the full chorus wailed forth its grief, uttered its declamation, gave forth its defiant challenge to the

enemy, demanded to be led to victory, supplicated the mercy, or praised the goodness of the great Jehovah.

Of course, none would have been surprised to hear that the solos all went well; the long-tried and well-known ability of the principal vocalists was of itself sufficient to render this a matter of certainty. But what surprised everyone was that an orchestra of 2500 performers could be got so completely under control that they could execute the most complicated choruses with as much ease and precision as would have been exhibited by four single individuals in the performance of a quartett. This fact forcibly demonstrates the care with which the voices must have been selected, and reflects great credit upon the discrimination of the committee of the Sacred Harmonic Society. Not the slightest flaw was discernible in any of the choruses; but, on the contrary, they were magnificently rendered.

The directors of the Sacred Harmonic Society, who undertook the whole management, appear to have entered heart and soul into the direction of the Festival; and the vastness, completeness, and grandeur of the preparations have been unparalleled in the history of art. The principal facts as regards the vast number of voices and instruments, and the immense space afforded by the transept of the Crystal Palace, have been already fully particularised. It will not, therefore, be necessary for us to go into more details in that respect. We may observe, however, that York Minster, on the occasion of the last musical gathering, supplied seats for 5200,—whilst the transept of this Palace alone contained 12,000 seats, exclusive of the galleries and other less advantageous places in the building.

The public are already aware that the three oratorios selected for performance at this Festival were the *Messiah*, *Judas Maccabæus*, and *Israel in Egypt*; and a better selection could not possibly have been made.

The grand public rehearsal took place on Saturday, the 13th ult., at the Crystal Palace. The principal choruses only were gone through, and some few of the solos, merely for the purpose of testing the capabilities of the place.

Regarding this performance, it will be sufficient to say that it entirely answered all expectations, and fully proved the careful training of the whole body of performers, under their able and indefatigable conductor, Mr. Costa.

The performance of the organ, upon each occasion, under the talented musician, Mr. Brownsmith, was of the most effective character, and its deep and powerful tones, resounding through the vast building, gave an imposing grandeur to the sublime choruses.

MONDAY.

This was the day appointed for the performance of the *Messiah*. The oratorio was commenced at one o'clock, and terminated at five. The Festival was appropriately opened by the National Anthem, the solo verses of which were sung by Madame Clara Novello, Miss Dolby, Mr. Sims Reeves, and Herr Formes.

Long previous to the commencement of the oratorio, a brilliant company had assembled, and the Crystal Palace, from end to end,—the nave, and courts, and galleries—the terraces outside, and the gardens beneath the terraces,—was alive with visitors anxiously anticipating the treat that was to come. The crowd, however, was by no means inconvenient, and the arrangements were excellent in every department. An immense crowd of people was collected outside the building, and remained there during the whole per-

formance. They were certainly not unrewarded, for during the choruses the peal of voices seemed to swell from the building, and fill the air, as though the Palace itself were a vast musical instrument.

The "Hallelujah Chorus" could be distinctly heard nearly half a mile from Norwood, and its effect, as the sound floated on the wind, was impressive beyond description, and sounded as if a nation were at prayers.

The overture to the *Messiah* sufficiently tested the qualities of the band, which was found to be all that could be required. The executants were perfect, and richly deserved the applause they received.

The first chorus, "And the glory of the Lord," filled the audience with wonder and admiration. It was delivered with a solid grandeur worthy of the occasion, and of the sentiment of the words. The responses of the bass and tenor voices, in the passage "all flesh shall see it," were delivered with great precision; and the passage, "For the words of the mouth of the Lord have spoken it," was wondrous for its broad and vigorous declamation. The most effective chorus in the first part was "For unto us a child is born." Nothing could be finer than the effect of this favorite piece, and the gradual ascent of the voices to the grand climax was like the advance to the attack of some light detachment of troops, followed by larger and larger forces, until at length, with volleys of musketry and roar of cannon, the great assault is made, and the triumphant result achieved. The following choruses were all given in the most admirable style; but as the vast assemblage rose at the first notes of the "Hallelujah," expectation was raised to the utmost. Great as may have been the anticipations formed by the thousands of visitors present, they must have fallen far below the actual results. Grand, massive, noble, and inspiring, as were the previous efforts, they were altogether overtopped by the lofty sublimity and majestic grandeur of this *chef d'œuvre* of the great composer. The union of the voices on the words, "For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth," brought out the full force and power of the orchestra, —while the reposeful passage which immediately follows displayed to great advantage the precision of the performers. A burst of applause, which could no longer be restrained, attested, at its conclusion, the overpowering effect of this colossal interpretation of the "Hallelujah Chorus." Without going into further detail regarding the individual beauties of this performance, it will suffice to say that every piece was performed with a precision and effect truly marvellous; and the concluding "Amen" was equal in all respects to the "Hallelujah," and formed a fitting climax to the most impressive and exciting performance of the *Messiah* which has ever been witnessed.

The solo singers distinguished themselves upon this occasion in a very remarkable manner. Madame Clara Novello, upon taking her seat, received a most cordial welcome, as did also Miss Dolby, Madame Rudersdorff, Mr. S. Reeves, Mr. Montem Smith, Mr. Weiss, and Herr Formes. The "Rejoice greatly" of Madame Novello was a wonderful performance, and such as no other singer in the world could have imitated. Each note was distinctly heard by every person present, and the applause which followed was overwhelming. In the air, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," her voice, her marvellous voice rang out clear as a bell. The audience listened in rapture, and the dead silence that pervaded amongst so many thousands while a single voice was filling every ear and touching every heart, was in it itself most impressive. Mr. Sims Reeves was equally successful; in some portions of his singing,

the vocal powers of this great artiste were never heard to better advantage,—but the greatest effect was produced in passages where he had an opportunity of gathering himself up for a loud burst: on such occasions, he was most triumphant. The other solo singers, although they acquitted themselves admirably, were not so conspicuous. In so vast a space, the high voices are more penetrating, and are heard to greater advantage.

An analytical programme of this oratorio, and of *Israel in Egypt*, written for the Sacred Harmonic Society, by Mr. G. A. Macfarren, and evincing much talent, was sold in the Crystal Palace, and materially assisted the audience in their appreciation of the music.

WEDNESDAY.

The second of these great commemorative festivals was given on Wednesday, in the presence of Her Majesty, with a grandeur and success surpassing, if possible, the performance of the *Messiah* on Monday. Under the admirable management that has distinguished this Festival, persons found their seats without trouble or hurry; and the officers connected with the Sacred Harmonic Society and the Palace were most painstaking and assiduous in their efforts to secure the comfort of all.

As the audience settled themselves into their places, a beautiful photograph of the whole scene, was taken making the royal box its centre. It was a perfect likeness, and so well and quickly done, that copies of it were printed, framed, glazed, and laid before the royal party before the first portion of the oratorio had been concluded. The spot from which it was taken was the gallery over the organ, from whence the finest *coup d'œil* which the festivals of this country have ever shown was presented.

Upon the entrance of the Queen, the National Anthem was sung in a most effective style. The first verse was superbly given by Madame Clara Novello; the second was sung as a trio by Miss Dolby, Mr. Sims Reeves, and Herr Formes; and the third, by the full orchestra.

The oratorio, although not so grand a work as the *Messiah* and *Israel in Egypt*, is still one of the greatest compositions of Handel, and has generally been a favorite with the public, owing to the number of striking melodies it contains, and the extreme beauty of the numerous solos with which most people are familiar. *Judas Maccabæus* was the twelfth of the nineteen sacred works written by the illustrious musician, in this country. It was planned and completed in the short space of one month, when Handel was in his 61st year, and was first performed on the 1st of April, 1747, with great success.

The three parts into which the oratorio is divided, are happily contrasted, there being a prevalence of pathetic music in the first, of heroic in the second, and of jubilant in the third,—stamping each with a certain characteristic individuality, of which the composer successfully availed himself. The music has been so often described, and the greater part of it is so well known, that to comment upon it now would be going over well-trodden ground to little purpose. A very able analysis of the oratorio, written by Mr. W. Pole expressly for the Festival, was sold in the building.

In the overture, one of Handel's most spirited orchestral preludes, the fugue was led off, and responded to by the violins and other stringed instruments with wonderful precision. The opening chorus, "Mourn, ye afflicted," a solemn and pathetic elegy for the death of Mattathias, the father of Judas, so sublime in its ex-

pression of grief, was remarkably well given; and the subdued undertone of the voices on the words "is no more," was in beautiful relief, and overpowering in its effect. Equally good was its companion in musical pathos, "For Sion lamentation make;" "O Father, whose almighty power," was highly impressive. The fugue, to which the words "And grant a leader bold and brave," are set, was everywhere pointed and correct. The brilliant and effective chorus, "We come, we come," to which the popular and energetic bravura bass air, "Arm, arm, ye brave," directly leads, was given with due emphasis, and produced a grand effect. The semi-chorus, "Disdainful of danger," so full of fire and impetuosity, was perfect from beginning to end. The greatest effect, however, in the first part, was produced in the chorus, "Hear us, O Lord," in which the choir displayed surpassing grandeur and power. The most perfect intonation, faultless time, and skilful execution of the florid passages, was evident throughout.

The chorus which commenced Part II., "Fall'n is the foe," was even a more powerful performance than any which had preceded it, and created a profound impression. It would be impossible, in our circumscribed space, to point out the manifold beauties of this prodigious display of choral singing—the voices, towards the end, where they join together in massive chords *fortissimo*, were overwhelming. In the tuneful and beautifully-harmonized choral piece which chimes in with the duet, "Sion now her head shall raise," the multitude of singers earned fresh laurels. With a passing word of praise for the performance of the striking chorus, "Hail, Judea!" and the pathetic lamentation, "Ah, wretched Israel!" we come to the magnificent renunciation, "We never will bow down," which constituted the culminating point of the entire performance. The execution of this sublime composition never was surpassed: the audience were thrown into a ferment of ecstasy, and the royal party exhibited their delight by the most energetic signs of approval.

The remarkable point in Part III. was the chorus, "See the conquering hero comes," which, as might have been anticipated, created prodigious enthusiasm. In vain Mr. Costa went on with the march which follows,—the audience would not be satisfied; and the conductor, still turning a deaf ear to their entreaties for an encore, Her Majesty came to the rescue, and nodding her head in approval the chorus was repeated. "Sing unto God," one of the most favorite morceaux of the oratorio, was no less fine in point of execution, and displayed Handel like a giant dealing with the simple and unpretending. The concluding chorus, "Hallelujah, Amen," was given in a style worthy of the rest, and appropriately terminated this remarkably fine performance.

The solo vocalists were Madame Clara Novello, Madame Rudersdorff, Miss Dolby, Mr. Sims Reeves, Mr. Montem Smith, Mr. Weiss, and Herr Formes. Madame Novello was greatly successful in the favorite airs, "Pious orgies," "O Liberty," and "From mighty kings;" the brilliancy and purity of her voice being heard to the greatest advantage. Her faultless execution, and truly Handelian style, obtained immense applause; nothing could be more purely devotional than her "Pious orgies,"—nothing more correct than her "O Liberty!"

Madame Rudersdorff sang both her solos, "Wise men flattering," and "So shall the lute," brilliantly; and Miss Dolby acquitted herself, as she always does, most honorably. The three trying airs—"Call forth

thy powers," "How vain is man," and "Sound an alarm," were sung by Mr. Reeves. The two war songs were masterpieces of vocal declamation; and the impression made upon the crowd was commensurate with the perfection of the singing. Mr. Montem Smith acquitted himself ably as second tenor; and the bass music was divided between Herr Formes and Mr. Weiss—the recitative and air, "Arm, arm, ye brave," being the distinguishing effort of the German, while "The Lord worketh wonders" gained most credit for the English singer.

At the conclusion of the oratorio, the Old Hundredth Psalm was sung, Her Majesty and the whole assembly standing. The third verse, "O enter then His gates with praise," was given in unison by the united voices of the 2000 singers; a more grand and impressive effect cannot be imagined.

FRIDAY.

The third and concluding performance, which took place on Friday, attracted a far more numerous attendance than the first two. The increase in the numbers is to be attributed partly to the growing popularity of Handel's masterpiece, *Israel in Egypt*, and partly to the great success which had attended the first two meetings of the Festival, and which had been extensively chronicled by tongue and pen. It was considered, too, and with good reason, that Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, in its stupendous and complicated choruses, was better adapted to show off the power and musical resources of the Festival monster force, than either the *Messiah* or *Judas Maccabæus*. Many who could afford only one day, chose the last as the most attractive of the three. The increase was principally in the half-guinea unreserved seats.

Israel in Egypt was given upon this occasion just as Handel would have loved to hear it. Such a performance must have entered into the great master's mind when he wrote those massive double choruses with which the work abounds. The execution of the oratorio on Friday even surpassed in excellence the performances of the *Messiah* and *Judas Maccabæus*, which, as the difficulties it presents are so much greater, argues a diligence on the part of the singers, and a determination on that of the conductor, that cannot be too highly commended.

The first chorus, "And the children of Israel sighed by reason of their bondage," where Handel has shown himself as grand a master of pathos as of the elaborations of counterpoint, was a foretaste of what was to come. The conviction that there would be a performance of unaccustomed excellence sprung at once from this beginning, and was fully warranted by the result. "They loathed to drink of the river; He turned their waters into blood"—the first of that unexampled chain of choruses by which the plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians, the miracle of the exodus, the destruction of Pharaoh's host, and the religious awe created in the minds of the favored people, are illustrated—was delivered with an accuracy and truth of intonation the more remarkable since the theme is composed of awkward intervals, chromatic in style, and treated throughout in the strictest and severest form of fugue. The impression produced by this most suggestive "tone-picture" was deepened by that of the next, "He spake the word," which embodies the plague of the flies, the lice, and the locusts—a composition of a very different character from its predecessors, but equally distinguished by descriptive eloquence. At the end of this fine piece the audience broke forth in loud applause, which, after the termination of the

succeeding chorus, "He gave them hailstones," was renewed in a manner so universal and tumultuous, that, notwithstanding Mr. Costa's disinclination to encores, he was compelled to yield to the desire of the audience. The singers throughout this chorus were fully alive to the magnitude of the subject, and sustained the score in all its integrity with a success as brilliant as it was complete. The grand composition, "He sent a thick darkness," was also rendered with terrible and majestic power; the basses thundered forth "over all the land." This is a piece of choral recitative, in which the words are sung, or rather spoken in unison, by all the voices, as if they formed the single voice of some mighty individual, while strains of harmony proceed from the instruments, so smothered, undefined, and gloomy, that the idea of something dark and appalling irresistibly presents itself. This chorus is of excessive difficulty, and its execution did the highest honor to the choir. The chorus "He rebuked the Red Sea" was one of the great features of the performance, especially the concluding portion, which describes the destruction of the host of Pharaoh, overwhelmed by the waters. Here again is toned-painting of the most marvellous kind: the howling of the storm, the raging of the billows, the sounds of terror and despair, are all pictured by the tremendous harmonies of the musician. The thanksgiving of the Israelites for their deliverance, concludes the first part of the oratorio.

The second part is defined as "Moses' Song" upon the original manuscript, and it consists of the rejoicing and thanksgiving of the Israelites upon their miraculous deliverance. The highly popular and favorite duet, "The Lord is a man of war," was sung by Herr Formes and Mr. Weiss, and was, as it always is, warmly applauded. Five choruses in succession next follow. To each of these we can award high commendation for the energy and the precision with which they were taken. In the bravura air, "The enemy said," Mr. Sims Reeves was brilliant and animated, and his expression of impotent rage was given with wondrous impetuosity. The next air, "Thou didst blow," contrasting, by its calm and tranquil music, with that which precedes it, was exquisitely sung by Madame Clara Novello, and the clear and distinct tones of the singer rang throughout the building, and were heard at its farthest extremity. The chorus, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord?" was superb and powerful; and the fugue upon the words, "The earth swallowed them," had an overpowering effect. The most splendid performance of the day was the grand final chorus, "Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." The manner in which, before the chorus joins in, Clara Novello sang the first words, alone, and unsupported by a single instrument, was something amazing,—the very triumph of vocal power; and, to the astonishment of all, not a syllable that she uttered was lost. The introduced cadence included a sustained C in alt.

The performance was concluded with "God save the Queen,"—the first and last verses being sung solo by Madame Clara Novello. Her high note in the last cadence, which was the town talk after the inauguration of the Crystal Palace, three years since, again excited admiration. And so terminated the Handel Festival of 1857,—a magnificent celebration, and a homage worthy of its illustrious subject.

MUSIC

AMONG THE POETS AND POETICAL WRITERS.

By MARY COWDEN CLARKE.

(Continued from page 11.)

THE narrator of the "Flower and the Leaf" says:

"I heard not far off suddenly
So great a noise of thundering trumpets blow
As though it should have departed the sky."
Chaucer.

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And this is a fine bold line in the "Faery Queen:"  
"Then shrilling trumpets loudly 'gan to bray."  
*Spenser.*

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"Nor with less dread the loud
Ethereal trumpet from on high 'gan blow."
Milton.

"He blew
His trumpet, heard in Oreb since perhaps
When God descended, and perhaps once more
To sound at general doom. The angelic blast
Fill'd all the regions: from their blissful bowers
Of amaranthine shade, fountain or spring,
By the waters of life, where'er they sat
In fellowships of joy, the sons of light
Hasted, resorting to the summons high."—*Milton.*

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"And hark! the approaching trumpets, with a start,  
On the smooth wind come dancing to the heart.  
A moment's hush succeeds; and from the walls,  
Firm and at once, a silver answer calls."  
*Leigh Hunt.*

"The train are in the town, and gathering near,  
With noise of cavalry, and trumpets clear;  
A princely music, unbedinned with drums:  
The mighty brass seems opening as it comes,  
And now it fills, and now it shakes the air,  
And now it bursts into the sounding square;  
At which the crowd with such a shout rejoice,  
Each thinks he's deafened with his neighbour's voice.  
Then, with a long-drawn breath, the clangours die;  
The palace trumpets give a last reply."—*Leigh Hunt.*

The same poet has another passage on the same instrument, that calls to mind Rubens's fine picture of a triumphal procession in painted illustration of the idea:—

"In many-footed order free  
First ride his guards, all staid to see;  
In midst of whom the trumpets blow,  
Straight as power and glory go."—*Leigh Hunt.*

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The poets have been felicitous in their epithets descriptive of certain instruments. Here are a few instances:—

"The summoning drum,
The air-shattering trumpet."—*Coleridge.*

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"The harsh bray  
The sneering trumpet sends across the fray."  
*Leigh Hunt.*

~~~~~  
"Soon, up aloft,
The silver, snarling trumpets 'gan to chide."
Keats.

"The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,
The kettle-drum, and far heard clarionet."—*Keats.*

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"The jocund flute, or gamesome pipe."—*Milton.*

~~~~~  
"Or kettle-drum, whose sullen dub
Sounds like the hooping of a tub."—*Butler.*

(Continued on page 79.)